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Sonoma County
Oral History Series

Julius Nervo &
Margaret Nervo

Interviewed by
Louise Davis



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Margaret Nervo

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June 1988

Transcription 1992

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INTRODUCTION

Julius & Margaret Nervo were interviewed on Geyserville history. They discuss family history — their Italian father and mother came to Geyserville before the turn of the century. Purchasing a parcel they set out to run the ranch, over the years they added eight children to help them and expanded from 10 acres of grapes to 135, from a small winery dug into the hillside to the Nervo stone winery (circa 1908) still standing today.

They cover neighbors and school days. They talk of a life far different from today, of horse and wagon days to public transportation. Margaret never married and lived in the family home for 80 years then moved to Healdsburg. Their brothers, Luke (86 years) and Frank (85 years), also never married and lived all their lives on the family property.

The interviewer is Louise Davis. Her father, Obed Bosworth and mother, Marie (Glaser) Bosworth Beers were both born to early settlers of Sonoma County. Her father worked with his father in their mercantile store in Geyserville for decades, with Marie joining Obed after their marriage (son Harry is now the proprietor of Bosworth and Son), here they not only sold goods but were collectors of history. After Obed's death in 1981 at 86, Louise realized she had missed recording his vast storage of information for future generations, this sparked her intense interest in Geyserville history. This interview is one of many undertaken by Louise to record and save an individual's knowledge for the future.

Julius Nervo and Margaret Nervo
Nervo Winery, Geyserville

Interviewed by Louise Davis
561 Matheson Street, Healdsburg, California
June 1988

Transcription Gail Ryan, Healdsburg 1992

- Louise Davis: I am visiting Julius Nervo at his home in Healdsburg, with him is his sister Margaret Nervo. Margaret can you tell me when the Nervo Family first came to the Geyserville area, and who was it?
- Margaret Nervo: It was our parents.
- Davis: Were your mom and dad already married when they came to Geyserville?
- M. Nervo: They must have been.
- Davis: And their names were?
- M. Nervo: Francesco, Frank Nervo, Sr. and Maria.
- Davis: You say they both came from Italy, someplace near Venice. Do you have any idea why they came to the United States?
- M. Nervo: I've often wondered. What year did they come over?
- J. Nervo: 1896.
- Davis: Were they already married?
- J. Nervo: Yes, I mean they were newlyweds.
- Davis: Why did they come to Geyserville?
- J. Nervo: That's a good question. He had no relatives up here. I think Italian Swiss Colony, he heard that they were hiring Swiss and Italians to work at the winery. That's probably what got him up here.
- Davis: Did he work at Italian Swiss?

- J. Nervo: No, I don't think so, he bought that place up there, where we are now. He worked in the train tunnel from Italy to Switzerland for three years and got a *big gold mine*. He told me one time, he was a coal miner at the age of nine.
- M. Nervo: Now, I don't believe that. A kid of nine couldn't do that. That couldn't be right.
- Davis: This is in Italy?
- So then he came to Geyserville and you don't know why?
- M. Nervo: No, just like the Meyers.
- Davis: Unless it had something to do with Italian Swiss, Asti.
- J. Nervo: Didn't Bart come first?
- Davis: And Bart was your father's brother. Where did he live?
- M. Nervo: Seattle.
- J. Nervo: He went to Seattle.
- Davis: He never lived in Sonoma County?
- J. Nervo: He would visit quite often.
- M. Nervo: Not too often.
- J. Nervo: He worked in a depot. He sold candy, popcorn—
- M. Nervo: Tickets, I don't know what company.
- J. Nervo: —newspapers, tickets for the buses going north and south.
- Davis: And this was in Seattle. And you said he might have come first to this country.
- J. Nervo: I'm just guessing.
- Davis: Do you have any idea who your dad bought his land from?
- J. Nervo: The ranch he bought, it was given to Captain Fitch, Fitch Mountain, Healdsburg, you know. It was given to him from the Spanish, he gave them one dollar to make it legal. Frank would remember this. There were three or four different owners before my parents bought it. It was all a cattle ranch. The Spanish had cattle at that time.

Two men bought it and planted a vineyard, (the same vineyard that's there now,) and eventually took out all the trees and brush clear down to the river. It was the biggest vineyard in this area after Italian Swiss Colony, they were the biggest.

- Davis: The owners before your dad? Or was it the second biggest vineyard when your dad bought it?
- J. Nervo: There were only ten acres of vineyard when he bought it. He worked it up to 135 acres. By taking the trees and brush and so forth out.
- Davis: So you mean, to start with there was only ten acres of vineyard.
- J. Nervo: Yes, it was the only income they had at that time.
- Davis: How many acres was it when your dad bought it, all together even the part that wasn't vineyard?
- J. Nervo: At least 250.
- Davis: So some of that was in the hill.
- J. Nervo: Of course, that's what we own now, 115 acres.
- Davis: You still own it?
- J. Nervo: The three of us.
- M. Nervo: The house and the hill, there's nothing in the back, nothing but trees.
- Davis: Where did your parents live when they first came?
- J. Nervo: Way up on the hill, in those days they built on top of hills. Nobody else did. Now everybody wants to be on the top the hills. So my father dismantled it, and took it down with horse and wagon and built right near Redwood Highway. (chuckles)
- Davis: There was already a house there, when they moved there?
- J. Nervo: Yes, up on the hill.
- Davis: Behind where the house is now?
- J. Nervo: Yes, behind the house.

- Davis: And your dad dismantled it and brought it down to the highway.
- J. Nervo: It was a wooden house. We built that house in 1925.
- Davis: Was the old house a two-story?
- J. Nervo: No, all one-story.
- Davis: All one-story, well, it must have had a lot of rooms in it, with all those children?
- J. Nervo: It was a big—this present house is like a hotel. Five bedrooms, fourteen rooms all together.
- M. Nervo: It looks big. In the middle is a patio, it's not a big one. Then there's a long hallway, I don't like hallways, it's always drafty in the winter, and a flat roof, it's hot in the summer, they don't last very long, they're no good. I wouldn't have a flat roof.
- J. Nervo: Here's something you don't see very often, the present house is solid concrete walls—
- M. Nervo: That was Frank's idea.
- J. Nervo: —We kids went to the river with a horse and wagon and hauled the gravel there. We had two car loads of cement coming by rail and two of lumber coming by rail.
- Davis: You would have been 15 years old when that house was built.
- J. Nervo: Yeah, I worked on it after high school.
- Davis: Who picked that design? Because it is unusual architecture —
- M. Nervo: Frank.
- J. Nervo: Roman—pillars.
- M. Nervo: They had the concrete and those forms. I don't know where he got the idea. Too many pillars bunched up together, I didn't like that.
- Davis: So that was Frank's idea.

- M. Nervo: Yes, he made those columns, he did. There was a lot of concrete there and steel. He made those forms little by little. Then he made all that pavement around the house. And the fence, the concrete fence, do you remember that?
- Davis: Yes, I do remember that, but it's not there anymore.
- M. Nervo: No, the freeway took it. I never cared for the fence, it reminded me of a cemetery fence.
- Davis: How many bedrooms did the old house have?
- M. Nervo: I don't remember that one really, it couldn't have been too many in those days.
- Davis: A lot of kids slept together.
- M. Nervo: Yeah, used bunk beds, like they do now even now, some of them use bunk beds.
- The Wisecarver House, (across the Highway 101 and slightly south of the Nervo property) that had high ceilings, gee, what high ceilings. How could they afford to build two-story homes in those days? Labor was down to nothing, and you worked long hours.
- Davis: Do you remember your mom and dad?
- M. Nervo: Oh, yeah.
- Davis: Tell me a little about your mom and dad.
- M. Nervo: Well, I know they worked there all their lives. She worked in the field all the time, too. I don't know how she did it. She worked out in the field more than he did.
- Davis: What were the names of some of your neighbors on the ranch?
- J. Nervo: Bill Ferguson.
- M. Nervo: Meyers—
- J. Nervo: —and wife.
- M. Nervo: Ernie Meyer and Claus Meyer they owned ranches right near by.
- J. Nervo: They were right next to Ferguson's.

M. Nervo: That's Lillie's brother.

J. Nervo: They had one girl—

M. Nervo: Mildred, married a Brackett.

Davis: And who else?

J. Nervo: Then comes Harry Meyer—

M. Nervo: The son.

J. Nervo: With two sons, Bob, he goes to the Chamber of Commerce meetings, he's retired.

Davis: I'm going to visit Bob Tuesday, so I'll get all the Meyer family history then. Were the Wisecarver's neighbors?

J. Nervo: Yes. Whitton, too. John Whitton.

Davis: Which Wisecarver? Was it Lucile's father?

J. Nervo: Lloyd's father.

M. Nervo: Lloyd's, his folks lived there, father and mother lived there.

Davis: Do you remember their names?

M. Nervo: They were a large family, they are scattered. Lucile could tell you.

J. Nervo: Lloyd, the banker, that's all I know.

M. Nervo: I remember Mr. Wisecarver, he was a tall man. They had mostly cherry orchards in those days. All the neighbors, cherries and a little grapes. Wisecarver was a good ranch.

Davis: Was it called *Hearts Desire* Ranch? I read that someplace.

J. Nervo: Yeah. Mostly cherries, unusual.

Davis: Very unusual.

J. Nervo: And John Whitton had some cherries. And he had a son called John. He just retired from the Asti winery.

Davis: I should talk to him.

- J. Nervo: He just moved to Healdsburg. I think that we are the last old family to own property in Geyserville. I think they all died or sold out.
- Davis: Whitton's sold out?
- J. Nervo: Whitton's sold out just a couple years ago.
- Alvin Reniff bordered us on the north, he never married.
- Davis: That's where the name Reniff Canyon came from?
- J. Nervo: Yes. That canyon was on his property.
- Davis: And his name was Alvin?
- M. Nervo: Yes, everyone used to go in there for walks.
- Davis: I've been in there for walks.
- J. Nervo: Didn't he have a sister?
- M. Nervo: Her name is Reynolds, lives in Mill Valley.
- J. Nervo: Who lives in Berkeley?
- M. Nervo: That's Elizabeth Reynolds. Reniff's sister married a man by the name of Reynolds from Mill Valley.
- J. Nervo: Schuetz, too. Bordered us to the south.
- M. Nervo: Where Mengali used to live, down the lane, do you know where Tankersleys live?
- Davis: Yes.
- M. Nervo: Well, there's a lane there, their home is way down—you can hardly see it.
- Davis: Mom talked about a lady by the name of Schuetz. And when mom remembers her, the husband was dead. I was thinking that her name was Anna?
- M. Nervo: Annie.
- J. Nervo: Yeah.

- Davis: I think they are buried in the cemetery, I've seen the name there. And she lived—
- M. Nervo: She was our neighbor, I remember her, she was deaf, too.
- J. Nervo: Kuno's (sp) still alive, in Salmon River, California, way up near Oregon. He never married.
- M. Nervo: He's about in his 90's by now.
- J. Nervo: How big a circle you want? (chuckles)
- Davis: (chuckles) That's a good question.
- What about Bill Andrews, Minerva's husband. Who owned that property before he bought it, that wouldn't be too far from you?
- M. Nervo: That used to be the Vaughan Ranch.
- J. Nervo: That would be the Old Vaughan Ranch.
- Did you know them? I knew them as kids.
- M. Nervo: I knew Anita, Anita lives over here on Second Street. Her name is Brigandi.
- J. Nervo: Anita lives a few doors from us.
- Davis: I have her on my list.
- Do you know who owned it before the Vaughan's owned it?
- J. Nervo: We couldn't remember that.
- Davis: Did Jim Anderson ever own it?
- M. Nervo: Not in our neighborhood.
- Davis: Someone by the name of Vassar? We're talking about going back a long time. In my grandfather's funeral records there are a couple Indians that died. And he has written something that they were buried on the Vassar Ranch. And I know that there is an old Indian Cemetery in Reniff Canyon.
- J. Nervo: They're pretty mad about that dump. (At the time of this interview, Sonoma County was researching a location for

a new landfill and this was one of a number of sites they were considering.)

Davis: And in another place, he has that the Indians were buried at the Jim Anderson place. And I don't know where the Jim Anderson place was!

M. Nervo: I don't know any older than us that would remember and tell you (laughs).

J. Nervo: Vaughan, Ferguson, Meyer, Meyer, Nervo, Schuetz, Wisecarver.

Davis: That's going kind of north to south.

J. Nervo: Right.

Davis: There weren't any other houses built by your family? Just the one brought down from the hill. And then the Roman style home.

J. Nervo: Yes.

Davis: When was the winery built?

J. Nervo: 1908. All of stone.

Davis: Now is that unusual? That it is all stone.

M. Nervo: In those days.

J. Nervo: For this county. Napa County has more.

Davis: Where did the stone come from?

J. Nervo: Jimtown. You know where that is? Near the river, in the hills. Carried by horse and wagon again. I don't know how they put them up there without machinery.

Davis: Well, the winery was built not too long after your mother and father came to Geyserville.

J. Nervo: No, there was a winery. The people that had 10 acres (of vineyard) had a winery south of the house. An old wooden winery dug into the hill to keep it cool.

Davis: For heaven sakes.

- J. Nervo: When the railroad when through, my father built the stone winery in 1908. I don't know how old the other one was, it goes way back.
- Davis: Did your father have only grapes?
- M. Nervo: Yes, until Prohibition came in, then he planted some prunes.
- J. Nervo: Originally, then Prohibition came, and all farmers did this, instead of having all grapes, they pulled out some of the grapes, so they could have some prunes and pears, so they could have some income. And then it went back to grapes.
- M. Nervo: Now everybody is taking out the prunes.
- Davis: Now, you only have grapes?
- J. Nervo: Only grapes.
- Davis: What about these other orchards you talked about, Meyer, Wisecarver? Did they have only grapes?
- J. Nervo: No. They were prunes and pears, a lot of pears.
- M. Nervo: Cherries—Ernie Meyer had good a pear ranch.
- J. Nervo: No grapes. Reniff had no grapes, he had prunes.
- M. Nervo: Meyer had mostly pears, some grapes, Ernie Meyer.
- Davis: They had other things besides grapes, but you had just grapes, and when Prohibition came in, you planted prunes, and now it is back to grapes.
- You can't remember the name of the people that your father bought the property from?
- J. Nervo: Yeah, two Swiss men, they built the house on top of the hill. And they were single men.
- M. Nervo: Monocco and Andreazzi.
- J. Nervo: Monocco is first. They built the wooden winery.
- Davis: Any idea when?
- J. Nervo: Our guess would be 1860.

- Davis: That was a long time ago.
- J. Nervo: Because they were the first, one of the first in the county, they were. Now we've been here 90 years in the grape and wine business. We sold half of it, Henry Trione owns it now. Geyser Peak bought it first.
- M. Nervo: That was Schlitz that bought Geyser Peak. They go by the old names, it's confusing, you don't know who the real owner is anymore. Then, Trione bought it out, and they replanted.
- Davis: And they own the Nervo Winery now, but they keep the same name.
- M. Nervo: Which I think is confusing. They do it with everything.
- Davis: I didn't know that, I thought that you still owned it.
- M. Nervo: It was in the newspaper.
- Davis: Is there anything left of that old winery?
- J. Nervo: No. You know what happened? The State burned it down when they put the freeway. We tried to stop them, but you can't stop them
- Davis: So I suppose, a part of the winery, the freeway frontage road just covered it over.
- J. Nervo: Here's something important. Those two men, in horse and buggy days the road then was a little closer to the house than it is now. They sold sandwiches and wine to the people that were going by in buggies. Probably the first in the state, a road side stand.
- Davis: How do you know that?
- J. Nervo: My older brother.
- Davis: Told you that.
- J. Nervo: Yeah. Frank used to have quite a bit of information in books, but I don't know what happened to it.
- Davis: Who built the stone winery?
- J. Nervo: My father.

- Davis: By himself?
- J. Nervo: No, he had it built by a stone mason from Santa Rosa. He built a lot of places in Santa Rosa out of stone. He was an Italian man.
- Davis: They quarried the rock in Alexander Valley and hauled it over in horse and wagon.
- J. Nervo: Actually, maybe it was a mile or so from the dump. Now owned by Jordon, the big winery man from Denver.
- M. Nervo: Just imagine they came from Denver. Have you ever been up there? My God, once they had an opening—
- J. Nervo: During Prohibition, you couldn't operate. So you sold your grapes to places, like Chicago, New York, San Francisco. I was going to bring up another point—in 1932, we built a tasting room and sales room near the winery in 1933. One of the oldest, probably the oldest winery that had wine tasting. Others sold but they didn't have wine tasting—for free.
- Davis: You were innovators.
- J. Nervo: Yeah (chuckles).
- M. Nervo: I don't know why they don't remodel and make it bigger.
- J. Nervo: But my brothers didn't like it, giving it away for free. And Gallo Brothers never did give away free wine. And they are the biggest in the world.
- Davis: Gallo is a lot newer than you are.
- J. Nervo: Oh, yes.
- Davis: I think Harry [Bosworth] told me that they came in after Prohibition.
- J. Nervo: Oh, yeah. They started in 1937. And we started probably in 1860.
- Davis: So, which do you think is the oldest winery in Sonoma County? Maybe Asti?
- J. Nervo: No we were before Asti. Buena Vista was before Italian Swiss Colony.

Davis: Yours is the oldest in this area?

J. Nervo: Northern Sonoma at least.

Davis: When did Asti start?

J. Nervo: 1881. And ours like I say, the Swiss men were 1860.

Davis: And you just took that over, so it was in continuous operation. Right?

J. Nervo: Yes. Except for Prohibition, but we were farming and sold the grapes. It went on all this time.

Davis: Did you have to close the winery down?

J. Nervo: Yes.

Davis: Then you picked the grapes and you shipped the grapes to other places.

J. Nervo: In boxes.

M. Nervo: Lug boxes.

J. Nervo: (We kept the wine) With permission, the winery was full of wine, 250,000 gallons, but you couldn't sell it during Prohibition. It was against the law to sell it, unless you were a bootlegger. We were about the only ones that didn't take advantage of it. We were afraid of getting caught.

Davis: Did it spoil?

J. Nervo: Oh no, it was super wine—aged.

M. Nervo: But it went high in acid—had to sell it to Biceglio (sp) for 9 cents a gallon—do you remember?

J. Nervo: Do you know what the big wineries did? Like Asti, Napa Valley, (Gallo wasn't in the business yet.) They got together and they had a law passed, that if you had so much acid, you couldn't sell it as wine. We had to sell it for vinegar at five cents a gallon. And they in turn worked it over, and made a lot of money.

Davis: Who did you sell that to—the high acid wine?

J. Nervo: Italian Swiss Colony.

M. Nervo: Biceglio too, in San Jose.

J. Nervo: For five cents a gallon.

M. Nervo: Biceglio.

J. Nervo: That was later. Originally, it was Asti by rail.

Davis: Did you have a rail stop at your winery?

M. Nervo: Yes.

J. Nervo: Not passenger, no. The freights, yes. If you wanted to ship fifty gallon barrels of wine, ten - fifty gallon barrels, the train would stop. The brakeman and the conductor would help us load them onto the boxcars.

Davis: Was there a little spur track, so another train could go by while you had cars there?

J. Nervo: Yes.

Davis: Who managed the winery. Well, your father did first—

J. Nervo: Until the kids grew up. Frank became the wine maker. Luke was the foreman of the ranch, and I was his helper (chuckles). And Robert was assistant wine maker to Frank.

Davis: So, there were four boys that worked at it.

J. Nervo: Actually six, but Mario was the first one to leave the ranch, and Eddie wasn't old enough to do much yet.

Davis: Where did Mario go?

J. Nervo: He got married and lived south of Healdsburg.

Davis: Did he have a ranch there?

J. Nervo: He managed a ranch for an old Italian family. All prunes wasn't it? I think so. A lot of Italians went into prunes.

M. Nervo: Prunes and some grapes.

J. Nervo: Generally, they were all wine makers, but some went into prunes, did real good.

Davis: So, Frank was the manager of the winery, Luke was the foreman, and when you were young you helped out, and who did you say helped out?

M. Nervo: Robert.

Davis: Did your dad—he never had to hire anyone else?

J. Nervo: During harvest season.

M. Nervo: And to prune, you couldn't do it all yourself. But they did most of the pruning, Robert, Frank and Luke.

J. Nervo: See, with six brothers, we could work—pruning took us three months, January, February, and March. Six brothers without outside help.

Davis: And this was 135 acres by this time, right?

J. Nervo: Yeah.

Davis: Was it all round the railroad tracks, down to the river?

J. Nervo: Yeah.

Davis: Who did your dad hire at harvest season?

J. Nervo: Anybody we could get (chuckles).

M. Nervo: We used to put signs out on the road, in those days—

J. Nervo: We'd put a sign out by the highway, "*Grape Pickers Wanted*." Later, the Mexicans came.

Davis: Right. What kind of people applied? Was it kids, was it transients?

J. Nervo: Transients. Mostly married couples.

M. Nervo: They had kids.

J. Nervo: What was that man's name—Moneymaker (chuckles). Probably didn't have ten cents.

M. Nervo: Odd name.

Davis: That was a name of a guy—Moneymaker? Where did they live?

- J. Nervo: Just drifted around.
- Davis: When they picked for you, where did they live?
- J. Nervo: I think they stayed in that cabin by the old winery, where we stored boxes, at harvest time we took them out. They stayed there.
- M. Nervo: And down by the river, they camped. They just came through to make enough money for gasoline and off they'd go.
- J. Nervo: Then local people—
- M. Nervo: The Marchetti's (sp) picked every year, they were from Healdsburg on Powell Street. He worked there all year round, pruning and—
- J. Nervo: Now about Scatena?
- M. Nervo: Nick, he used to live on Ernie Meyer's Ranch. I don't know if he worked on our ranch?
- J. Nervo: I remember him pruning, but maybe not picking.
- Davis: Does the inside of the winery now, look about the same as when your dad had it?
- M. Nervo: Yeah. I don't know why they don't remodel.
- J. Nervo: There may be a few changes, but mainly the same. Concrete floor, other wineries were dirt floors. He had a pretty good winery for that time.
- M. Nervo: It was cool inside.
- Davis: Especially with those rocks.
- You said the rock winery was different, the other wineries in the area were not stone. Why do you think he built the winery of stone?
- J. Nervo: Well, probably where he lived, in Italy they used a lot of stone, plus the man in Santa Rosa started building for the railroad and other things, and he had heard of him.
- Davis: What were the other wineries built of?
- J. Nervo: Just wood—or tin, corrugated tin.

M. Nervo: Just frame.

Davis: Are any of them still standing?

J. Nervo: The Frenchman's down the highway was, the freeway tore it down.

Davis: Fredson?

J. Nervo: Yes.

M. Nervo: They bought one in Dry Creek, a good location. They keep adding on, too.

Davis: But it came in after Prohibition, didn't it?

J. Nervo: Yeah.

Davis: What were some of the earliest wineries, after Asti and Nervo?

J. Nervo: Sink, in Cloverdale, John Sink. He had a concrete winery, very small, but it's still standing. The one Fredson bought in Dry Creek after the State took his out, but that was wood. Maybe it has some galvanized here and there. But he made a good winery out of the place.

Davis: What about Seghesio? Is that an old one?

J. Nervo: They're old.

Davis: And it's a wooden one.

J. Nervo: It's wood. There used to be a big winery right in Geyserville.

Davis: California Wine Association, Bosch.

J. Nervo: Bosch was the manager, until he decided to quit and start the Baha'is.

Davis: Do you remember that winery?

J. Nervo: Hardly. I remember Bosch, cause I'd walk to Geyserville to catch the train. The 6:00 train for San Francisco and he'd be on it, and coming back at night he'd be on it. I found out why so many nuns and preachers rode the trains—they got a free pass (chuckles).

- Davis: His winery, the California Wine Association, I guess was huge.
- J. Nervo: They also had a warehouse at Richmond. All brick.
- Davis: Did they have wineries in any other place?
- J. Nervo: In California? San Joaquin Valley...
- Davis: No, I mean did the California Wine Association have any other wineries?
- J. Nervo: Not that I know of.
- End of side one.
- J. Nervo: They shipped 50 gallon barrels our of Richmond to New York around the Horn.
- Davis: I read someplace it was the largest winery in Northern California, maybe in California at one time. That was long-ago.
- M. Nervo: There weren't very many in those days, now look at it. They're popping up all over. I don't understand it, I really don't.
- J. Nervo: Soda Rock Winery, Alexander Valley.
- Davis: That's an old one?
- J. Nervo: Yes, fairly. It has false rock in front and the rest of it is all wood. Who else?—I can't think of any others.
- Davis: When was it that the State bought part of that land from you? The freeway went through in 1975. So when did they buy from you—early '70's or late '60's?
- J. Nervo: No. Must be early '70's. They took out about 10 acres of vineyard. And they burnt down the old wine cellar, which we wanted to keep as a souvenir (chuckles).
- Davis: The old winery?
- J. Nervo: Yeah. You can't stop them.
- Davis: No, they have the right to go through any place they want.

M. Nervo: I thought that was a wild looking place the eucalyptus trees—

Davis: The old winery, was kind of a spooky place?

M. Nervo: To me, ou—

J. Nervo: There may be some I missed. Fred Mazzoni made a winery out of his barn. I don't know, but probably after Prohibition. You can check it out with—Jim.

Davis: Jim.

J. Nervo: Well, Herman, (Duane Herman) the barber married into the family.

Davis: Right, Dolores Mazzoni. Oh, Fred Mazzoni, it would be her father, her father.

M. Nervo: His wife is still living.

Davis: Right.

When did you sell the winery to Geyser—

J. Nervo: Schlitz Brewing Company. 1974.

M. Nervo: Was it '74 or '73?

J. Nervo: (Sold) half the ranch. Kept the west side.

Davis: So, how many acres do you still have?

J. Nervo: About, let's see, it should be 135 acres.

Davis: So, the 135 acres are owned by you, Margaret, and Ed, now.

J. Nervo: Now? Now it is 115 acres. The 135 acres went to—which is now Henry Trione.

Davis: You sold 135 acres?

J. Nervo: Yes.

Here's something interesting. Some wineries are beginning to ship wine to Japan. They're making a big deal out of it. My father sold to Japan before Prohibition

in 50 gallon barrels. And these people think they are the first ones (chuckles).

Davis: So, it went on the train to San Francisco?

J. Nervo: Train to San Francisco and then the ships.

Davis: What kind of grapes did you grow?

J. Nervo: We specialized in Zinfandel, that's what we had the most, then Carignane, Petite Sirah, they call it now, Malvasia—and white wine, Golden Chasselas and Burger. We were one of the first to make Zinfandel a famous wine. Now it's getting real famous!

Davis: Margaret, you went to high school. What were you? A year ahead of my mom?

M. Nervo: But she didn't graduate, did she.

Davis: No.

M. Nervo: Well, I thought she did, she didn't.

Davis: Did you graduate?

M. Nervo: 1926.

Davis: 1926. Who was your principal?

M. Nervo: Mr. Billman. He taught school and was the principal at the same time, they don't do that anymore.

Davis: No, they don't do that. (To Mr. Nervo) We're talking now about the high school. Who were some of your teachers?

M. Nervo: Mrs. Dinwiddie, Mrs. Clarke—

J. Nervo: Dinwiddie, Sahr—

M. Nervo: Did you know Sahr?

Davis: No, (laughs) but I heard about him, he had a wooden leg. He was the science teacher and somebody tied his leg to the table once.

M. Nervo: (Laughing) They used to play tricks on him, oh, gosh! Those high school kids were always in mischief. And Miss Hubsch.

- J. Nervo: We didn't go to grammar school in Geyserville.
- Davis: Where did you go to grammar school? I bet you went to Independence?
- M. Nervo: Had about eight scholars.
- J. Nervo: That school is still standing too, behind Lampson's house. We all walked down there.
- M. Nervo: No buses, teachers walked. Bertha Meyer was the first teacher. Then her niece came to live with her and taught when Bertha quit.
- J. Nervo: One room, one teacher.
- M. Nervo: Yeah. She taught all the grades, from eight to four.
- Davis: From 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock?
- M. Nervo: Yes, long hours in those days.
- J. Nervo: Now, two of our neighbors were teachers, Ferguson and Meyer.
- M. Nervo: Bertha Meyer, first.
- J. Nervo: And Ruby Ferguson, they taught there.
- Davis: What other kids went to school with you?
- M. Nervo: Iola Stone. Williams, that used to live on the Whitton's ranch, Bessie Williams, did Bessie go to grammar school there, I guess she did? Gernie, do you remember Gernie? Waltenspiels. They went to grammar school there, and I think Russell Patteson did too.
- J. Nervo: Ah. what about Bob Meyer? He must have gone there.
- M. Nervo: Oh, I guess so and the Fredson boys did. Yes, there were about eight or nine scholars. That's all.
- Davis: What were some of those other names you just said?
- M. Nervo: Waltenspiels, Charlie and Noe.
- Davis: Oh, that's the last name. Waltenspiel.

- M. Nervo: They lived on the Whitton Ranch for awhile, didn't they?
- J. Nervo: John Whitton—must have gone.
- M. Nervo: Yeah, they lived near by.
- J. Nervo: How about Hobb?
- M. Nervo: All I think of is Iola Stone.
- J. Nervo: Fredson's come in later, they used to be south of Healdsburg with their winery. How about Seitz?
- M. Nervo: Fredson's must have come, I remember Leonard and Donald, too. There was no other school to go to in that area. There was Lytton School, but they didn't go there. It was called the Booth School, where the Salvation Army is.
- Davis: Right, William Booth.
- J. Nervo: Not many children, we were the biggest family with nine children (laughs).
- Davis: You furnished most of them.
- M. Nervo: Luke went to Healdsburg High School. Who was the teacher in those days, I don't remember? I only remember the one with the knee, what was her name? When I went into third grade, Mrs. Wilson, she was living in Healdsburg.
- Davis: And who was Mrs. Wilson, a teacher at Independence?
- M. Nervo: Yes, Ruby went to San Jose. She went back to college, back to school and taught many years before she passed away. She always lived with her Aunt Lillie.
- Davis: When did Independence School close? When did it consolidate with Geyserville?
- M. Nervo: Well, I went to high school in Geyserville. It must have been in '22, '21 must have been the year they closed it up.
- Davis: 1922 or '21.
- M. Nervo: Cause I went to high school at Geyserville, a freshman and they didn't have any—there wasn't anymore grammar school there .

- Davis: It was already closed when you went to high school?
- M. Nervo: When I went to high school, they had already closed Independence. They should have kept a school in the country. Small towns are better that way, don't you think?
- J. Nervo: In high school they had a school bus. Not a fancy one in those days.
- M. Nervo: I remember George Stone used to drive it. Little tiny square...
- J. Nervo: He was too old to drive.
- Davis: Don't you mean John, John Stone?
- M. Nervo: Right, John Stone.
- J. Nervo: George was the son.
- M. Nervo: Iola's father.
- J. Nervo: You know what he did? He must have been eighty years old (chuckles), he looked like it. They didn't have the door in front, it was in the back. You'd have to climb stairs, he'd take off before you got on.
- M. Nervo: It's a wonder we didn't fall and break our necks.
- Davis: (Chuckling)
- M. Nervo: I remember when Luke went to high school down there, how did he get there, horse and buggy? He went to high school down there for a while.
- Davis: You mean in Healdsburg?
- M. Nervo: When Luke went to school, there was no high school in Geyserville.
- Davis: When did it start? In 1915.
- M. Nervo: Frank went to high school up there. It was an old building I believe. Wonder what happened to those old pictures?
- Davis: It was in Woodman Hall from 1915 to 1920.
- M. Nervo: Oh, you have that down.

Davis: 1920 was when the old high school was built.
And you, Julius, were in Mom's class, right? Marie Glaser.

M. Nervo: She wasn't in your class was she?

J. Nervo: I don't think so.

Davis: When did you graduate?

J. Nervo: 1928. I don't think she did.

Davis: Maybe not. She never graduated.

M. Nervo: I always thought she did.

M. Nervo: How long did she go to high school?

Davis: Just two years.

M. Nervo: I never liked high school either.

J. Nervo: I think she was a little bit older than me.

Davis: Who was in your class?

J. Nervo: Wilma Waters, Eleanor Wisecarver, Hildebrandt, Black, Walter Bell, Jim Reilly, Malcom Coombs. I guess that's it.

Davis: That was not my mother's class.

J. Nervo: I think she must have been ahead of me.

Davis: If you graduated in 1929, I think you're right. She would have graduated with Helen Petersen, Morris Fay, Wendall Black, maybe Josephine Brignoli.

J. Nervo: Who?

Davis: Josephine Brignoli.

J. Nervo: She wasn't in my class. They all went there, her three sisters and a brother, I guess, from Canyon Road.

Davis: Right.
What did you do after you got out of high school? You didn't go back to the ranch, did you?

- J. Nervo: For awhile.
- M. Nervo: He was there for awhile.
- J. Nervo: I graduated in '28 and then went to Sweets Business College in 1930, in Santa Rosa. And Junior College in '31 and '32. I actually started college to get Robert started. But he went one year and he quit. I kept on going. (chuckles). The rest of them wanted to be farmers, I guess. Because Luke, Frank, Mario they didn't go to college. How about Elinor?
- M. Nervo: She went to business college, Sweets Business College, I remember.
- Davis: In Santa Rosa?
- J. Nervo: I would have stayed on the ranch, but there were too many of us. Too many ideas (chuckles). So Mario left. I wanted to expand the winery and they didn't want to. So, I left when my mother and father died. Because I was their chauffeur. He always liked to go for a ride on Sunday afternoon.
- Davis: What did you do then?
- M. Nervo: He drove a Greyhound bus.
- J. Nervo: The trains went through our ranch, right behind the winery. A lot of trains, with lots of passengers. I wanted to be a railroad engineer. But in the crash of '29 everything went to pieces. The railroad went down to nothing. I was always interested in transportation. Airplanes, trains, buses. So when my father died I went to work for Greyhound in Santa Rosa. So I drove Greyhounds for 35 years.
- Davis: What route did you have?
- J. Nervo: Anything you can think of. From San Luis Obispo to Coos Bay, Oregon. Lake County, Napa County, any road they had I was on it. Up the coast, Fort Bragg, I liked that. Some drivers had the same run all their lives, especially on the Eureka Run, because they paid more, you had to work up to it, seniority you see. Worked seven years or extra before I could hold a run. I drove 3 million miles without an accident. A car never hit me and I never hit a car (chuckles).

- Davis: When did you retire from bus driving?
- J. Nervo: I can remember this easy, November 1, 1970. I retired quite a few years ahead of time. I didn't go to 65, 60.
- Davis: And then you went into real estate after that, kept busy.
- J. Nervo: And I'd help with the winery. Take a month off every year for harvest season and ran the retail room while the other brothers did the other things.
- Davis: Margaret, what did you do after graduation?
- M. Nervo: Nothing, I stayed home. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I didn't like anything. Let's put it that way. I would have gone to business college, but I'm not good at that office work. I would have gone, though. My sister went, maybe six months to business college. When they had to go a year, they had to make it longer. She took bookkeeping, shorthand. Frank and Elinor were naturally born bookkeepers, I wasn't. I wish I was. To this day—
- Davis: I'm sure you had an important thing to do at home. Were your mom and dad still alive when you graduated from high school?
- M. Nervo: Sure, in fact, my mother fractured her hip when I graduated from high school.
- Davis: And you took care of her?
- M. Nervo: Oh yes. And she always had to walk with two crutches. Then she walked with a cane. Do you know she planted the flowers she liked in the garden and she never complained of her hip? It hurt all of the time. It was a bad break, right at the socket. I don't think Dr. Sohler set it right, you know in those days. So really, she never had any freedom, raised a family, worked out in the field, too. And it was a lot of work, no washing machine in those days, but my sister helped with the washing. I tell you a lot of men's clothes and sheets, oh boy. But when my sister left, we didn't have a machine (chuckles) I sent most of those sheets to the laundry. It was too hard work washing by hand, you remember those days? The old fashioned, the old tubs, bring hot water in. Oh my.
- Davis: When did your mother die?
- M. Nervo: What year?

Davis: Yes.

M. Nervo: 1960. Because that's when Renilda passed away in 1962.

J. Nervo: 1960.

Davis: So you took care of her until then?

M. Nervo: Oddly enough, I always stayed there.

Davis: You kept house for her—

M. Nervo: I didn't want to stay there by myself. Too spooky.

Davis: Frank lived there too?

M. Nervo: Oh, yeah, he lived there all his life.

Davis: You both lived there all your lives.

M. Nervo: Frank and I lived there all our lives.

Davis: When did Frank die?

J. Nervo: A couple years ago.

Davis: So, he didn't die very long ago?

J. Nervo: Oh, no.

M. Nervo: Luke died—

Davis: Luke died first? When did Luke die?

M. Nervo: He was deaf for many years, I had to write notes to him.

Davis: A few years ago?

J. Nervo: A couple of years.

Davis: Then Frank right after that.

M. Nervo: You know Frank fell many years ago, he was down at the winery and watching a tank, and injured his knee. As he got older he wasn't able to do much. He wasn't able to do anything, he would like sit down, but he had problems with that knee. Had a lot of trouble with it. Had to walk with a cane.

- J. Nervo: Oh, Eddie. When Eddie left, when we got married in 1943, we started a travel bureau in Santa Rosa, the second one. They only had one. And Eddie worked for us. Our line was coming through from Eureka, and I got a contract (airplane) to haul passengers, the mail, railway express and I got Eddie to do that. Things weren't too good at the airport. nobody was riding planes, so everybody quit. The mechanics, the dealers. I had two planes and I sold them at a loss. Then Eddie, went through us. Knowing the airlines, we got him a job with TWA selling tickets in San Francisco. Then he got a job with Pacific Far East Steamship Line and stayed there until he retired.
- Davis: Do you have something there Margaret?
- M. Nervo: I have this,(reads from book) Luke passed away February the 12th, 1985 and Frank passed away May the 9th, 1986, and Robert, August the 7th, 1977.
- Davis: When did you leave the ranch? You said it was last year? Left the Roman house and moved here into the city.
- M. Nervo: August, the latter part of last year.
- J. Nervo: Eighty years in one place.
- Davis: A long time.
- J. Nervo: Well, Luke was there 86 and Frank 85.
- M. Nervo: That's a long time, nobody stays in the same place, some people move all the time.
- Davis: Certainly do.
- J. Nervo: We also started the first travel bureau in Petaluma. She did the books, cause I was driving for Greyhound.
- M. Nervo: Did you have any business there?
- J. Nervo: Naw, Santa Rosa had about 25. But Santa Rosa had a population of 10,000 when I drove for Greyhound. Now it's a 100,000.
- Davis: One other thing I want to ask you about, Julius, and that is the Geyserville Chamber of Commerce. Mom says that she thinks there was a Chamber a long time ago, like in the 20 and 30's. Is that true?

- J. Nervo: Fifty years ago! Catelli opened that restaurant 50 years ago, and the father and Everett Lampson, Obed Bosworth, and myself started the Chamber of Commerce, 50 years ago.
- Davis: So that would have been in the mid-'30's?
- J. Nervo: Even in the '20's because I was still on the ranch until I was 32. A lot of people—
- Davis: And you were still on the ranch when the Chamber started?
- J. Nervo: Yeah. Also, started, believe it or not, I was just a kid I might say, a Farmer's Union. Not a Worker's Union a Farmer's Union, oh that was a long time ago. In the early twenties, we had big crowds at the grammar school. We started a gasoline co-op so we could get gasoline cheaper for the farms. I borrowed my folks' truck, Clem Vanoni sold us two gas tanks, and I started in. No pay for me, no pay for my folks. Clem sold us the tanks, so he made a little out of it. So we were going strong, and we think, Standard Oil didn't like the idea—us getting in the gas business. Do you know what they did? They spread rumors that we were a bunch of communists. In two months, we were broke. That's a best way to kill a person, call him a communist.
- Davis: Go on, tell me more about the history of the Chamber. Now, you say it started with Catelli, Bosworth, you and Lampson. You say you started it in the late '20's. then what happened?
- J. Nervo: Then the man that lived next to Clement, he was a retired school teacher from Calistoga, he was a nice man.
- Davis: Pedulla?
- J. Nervo: He was secretary-treasurer, he came down to the real estate office, and said, "When are we going to get some new members?"
- Davis: Was this Joe Pedulla?
- J. Nervo: Yeah.
- Davis: Well that was later wasn't it? What happened to the—did it just kind of peter out?

J. Nervo: No, it just went.

Davis: Didn't Vanoni get active in this, Clement Vanoni?

J. Nervo: Oh, yes. He and I, I'll go back a little further. Clem used to like to "raz", Everett Lampson, I guess you'd call it. See, he was always complaining, and I was a friend of his, too. Everett and others they got fed up with Lampson. I mean Clem, and they disbanded the Chamber and they formed the Kiwanis Club. People think that that is the end of the Chamber, no, Clem and I picked it up right away and we got it to go and got the membership up to 40. And it would have to go to the Grange Hall because Catelli's couldn't handle us. So then Clem got kind of lazy like and he didn't have meetings as often as he should, so in 1974, the year we sold the winery, the newcomers were starting to come in, you see, we built that up and up and met once a month, had dinners and speakers and so forth, and now I think they have about 200 members. and always about 100-125 for dinners. It never did stop. The newcomers put an ad in the paper, "New Chamber of Commerce Formed." I got after the Reveille, cause they kept putting that ad. I said, "You better take out that ad, cause you're wrong, I can prove that it's 50 years old, it never did stop." So he finally took the sign down.

Davis: What business was Clem in?

J. Nervo: He was a farmer for one thing, cattle man which his father had and his son still has. Besides that he was an electrician, and he sold irrigation pipes for the vineyards and he sold everything, Fridgidares, washing machines, he was right in town. The building is still there.

Davis: Right next to the old telephone office.

J. Nervo: And his wife was chief (telephone) operator for a long time, until they went to the automatic.

Davis: Ann.

You said the Chamber kind of slowed down for a while. When was that, what decade? In the 40's, the 50's, the '60's and you said that it kind of went defunk for awhile?

J. Nervo: No, it never did. We always had our President, Vic-President, Secretary-Treasurer, our account in Geyserville.

- Davis: Who were the people that stayed active before the newcomers came?
- J. Nervo: The original names I mentioned, then as we grew up we did this. At that time, the shoemaker closed, the drug store closed, no more doctors, no more dentists. So we'd go to Healdsburg to get them to join—for something that we needed. So that does it up pretty good.
- Davis: Cloverdale?
- J. Nervo: Not much.
- Davis: What Geyserville people stayed active in it? You and Vanoni, were there any others?
- J. Nervo: Jim Pierce, manager of the bank. Of course, the Nervo Winery belonged, Luke Nervo belonged. Some farmers.
- Davis: I thought I heard Pete Stone, was active in it?
- J. Nervo: Yes.
- Davis: But Bosworth and my father had dropped out by then? And Lampson?
- J. Nervo: Lampson, he killed the Chamber, see. He didn't want any more Chamber so he brought in the Kiwanis.
- Davis: Now when did the Kiwanis start, 1974?
- J. Nervo: No, way back.
- Davis: The new chamber started in 1974, with the newcomers.
- J. Nervo: That was the newcomers, you might say.
- Davis: When did the Kiwanis start?
- J. Nervo: Right away. They killed the Chamber.
- Davis: About when? '50's?
- J. Nervo: Fifty years ago. Catelli's has been there 50 years, that's when the Chamber started.
- Davis: You mean the Kiwanis started 50 years ago, too?

- J. Nervo: Well, there might have been a little lapse—not much.
- Davis: I thought, Lampson was in the old Chamber and got tired of it and dropped out and formed the Kiwanis?
- J. Nervo: He killed the Chamber completely, just a couple of years after the start. He had no idea Clem was going to do that. He thought he had killed it completely I guess.
- Davis: So, the Chamber started in the 1930's and only lasted just a couple of years, and then Everett Lampson killed it and formed the Kiwanis Club. But you and Clement picked the Chamber up and kept it going. I see. I didn't know that the Kiawanis was that old.
- J. Nervo: Oh yes. It was pretty big for Geyserville, too. But they were doing like the Chamber, picking members from Cloverdale and Healdsburg.
- Davis: Now what about—was there any connection between the Chamber, the new members, the Warm Springs Dam and Clement? I heard a rumor that Clement had some kind of a problem for using the funds of the Chamber for the Warm Springs Dam?
- J. Nervo: Well, Clem Vanoni was all for the dam, because he figured he would sell pipes and things like that to the dam. See. This is something that is hard to believe. When they talked about the Geysers, that was at least 25 years or more ago. A man came, Magma Drilling Company. Then there was another name. A tall guy was the president. He came to our Chamber. Not one Chamber would back the idea except Geyserville. You would think that Healdsburg would or Cloverdale would? McMillan! He's dead now. We used to have him come talk.
- Davis: So, back to the dam. Clement was in favor of the dam because he thought he could sell a lot of pipes?
- J. Nervo: Sure.
- Davis: Then what happened?
- J. Nervo: Later, later when the Army Corps of Engineers got into that, that made him mad. And he dropped out.
- Davis: I thought he was against the dam?

- J. Nervo: Not at first, he opposed the dam when he couldn't sell anything, he was against the dam (chuckles).
- Davis: So he used the funds of the Chamber to fight the dam, is that correct?
- J. Nervo: I couldn't say, unless Clem did it with some of the other directors.
- Davis: Who were some of the other directors? Do you remember who they were?
- J. Nervo: Obed Bosworth, the banker—
- Davis: Pierce.
- J. Nervo: —Who else was amongst us, I was, he was, in this time I was President 5 years, not in a row. And Clem was President 5 years, taking turns. Jim didn't want it and Bosworth didn't want it, so we took turns keeping it going.
- Davis: My dad (Obed Bosworth) was an old friend of Clem's, wasn't he? They were old buddies.
- J. Nervo: Oh sure. Clem was a very good friend of Obed's. He was in the Chamber a long time ago, he didn't stay with it. I guess he did it more to get it started.
- Davis: And then he dropped out too.
- J. Nervo: Well, he was quite thick in the Odd Fellows, he was pretty busy, I guess, doing book work at night and stuff like that.
- Davis: That's right he was active with the Odd Fellows. Do you still go to the Chamber, Julius?
- J. Nervo: Yes, all the time.

End of Tape

Transcription and Final Typing by: Gail Ryan 1992

Mr. Julius Nervo passed away July 19, 1989.

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